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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
WORLD CONFERENCE ON NATURAL
DISASTER REDUCTION
Geneva, 14-18 March 1994

REPORT OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION ON ITS SESSION

Corrigendum

Page 36, ANNEX III

For the existing text substitute

ANNEX III

Outline of a draft final document for the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, containing proposals for a plan of action

The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World

Guidelines for (natural) disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation

The States participating in the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, convened at Yokohama, Japan, from 23 to 27 May 1994,

Recognizing the rapidly rising world-wide toll in human and economic losses due to natural disasters,

Recalling the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 44/236 of 22 December 1989 to launch a far-reaching global undertaking for the 1990s to save human lives and reduce the impact of natural disasters,

Recalling the forward-looking decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 to adopt an integrated approach for disaster management in all its aspects and to initiate a process towards a global culture of prevention,

Recognizing that sustainable economic growth and sustainable development cannot be achieved in many countries without adequate measures to reduce disaster losses, and that there are close linkages between disaster losses and environmental degradation, as emphasized in Agenda 21, 1/

Reaffirming the relevance of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 2/ in particular Principle 18, which stresses the need for the international community to assist States afflicted by natural disasters and other emergencies that are likely to produce sudden harmful effects in the environment of those States,

Emphasizing the need for the United Nations system to pay special attention to the least developed, land-locked and island developing countries, and recalling in this regard that the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s called for giving priority attention to least developed countries in the activities of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction,

Responding to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 48/188 of 23 December 1993 to:

(a) Review the accomplishments of the Decade at national, regional and international levels;

(b) Chart a programme of action for the future;

(c) Exchange information on the implementation of Decade programmes and policies;

(d) Increase awareness of the importance of disaster reduction policies;

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.

2/ Ibid., annex I.

The States, participants in the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction,

At the time of reaching the mid-point of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, reaffirming our commitment to pursuing, through national and international efforts, the transformation of the International Framework of Action for the Decade into a decisive intersectoral Plan of Action,

Acting in a new spirit of partnership to build a safer world, based on common interest, sovereign equality and shared responsibility to save human lives, defend individuals from physical injuries, protect property and contribute to ensuring progress and stability,

While it is generally recognized that each country bears the primary responsibility for protecting its own people, infrastructures and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters, it is accepted at the same time that, in the context of increasing global interdependence, concerted international cooperation and an enabling international environment is vital to the success of these national efforts,

Adopt the following principles, strategy and plan of action.

I. PRINCIPLES

(Executive summary of the World Conference)

Explanatory note

The informal preparatory process has shown that if the Yokohama document is to reach both the political decision makers and the private sector of society with an attractive and sellable message that creates interest and generates will for action, it should comprise a declaratory part and a well-defined set of recommendations and activities (plan of action); the document could be used as a whole or each section separately. This section (I) will be the declaratory part and its text should be based on the following points.

1. Risk assessment is a required step for the adoption of adequate and successful disaster reduction policies and measures.

2. Disaster prevention and preparedness are of primary importance in reducing the need for disaster relief.

3. Disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation should be considered as important aspects of development policy and planning at the national, bilateral, multilateral and international levels.

4. Early warnings and the effective dissemination of such information are the keys to disaster prevention and reduction.

5. Preventive measures are most effective when they involve participation at all levels, from the local community through the national government to the international level.

6. Vulnerability can be reduced by the application of proper design and patterns of development focused on target groups, by appropriate education and training of the whole community, and by transfer of technology.

7. Environmental protection as a component of sustainable development consistent with poverty alleviation is imperative in the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters.

8. Each country bears the primary responsibility for protecting its people, infrastructure, and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters. The international community should demonstrate strong political determination required to mobilize adequate resources and make use of existing resources, including financial, scientific and technological means, in the field of natural disaster reduction, bearing in mind the needs of the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries.

A. Basis for the Strategy

Explanatory note

This chapter should get the message across primarily to political decision makers and the general public that the basic principles of the Decade are as valid as ever, and that urgent, concerted action is required if the Decade's implementation is to succeed during its second half. Therefore, the principles must be restated in the light of the experience gained since 1989.

1. Natural disasters continue to strike and increase in magnitude, complexity, frequency and economic impact; urgent action is required.

2. The phenomena causing natural disasters are in most cases beyond human control. Society, therefore, must recognize and strengthen traditional ways and explore new ways to live with such risk, and take actions to prevent as well as to reduce the effects of such disasters.

3. The least developed countries, small island and land-locked countries are the most vulnerable countries, as they are the least equipped to mitigate the effects of disasters.

4. Developing countries affected by desertification, drought and other types of natural disasters are also equally vulnerable and least equipped to mitigate the effects of natural disasters.

5. In all countries the poor and socially disadvantaged groups suffer most from natural disasters and are least equipped to cope with them.

6. Disasters contribute to social, economic, cultural and political disruption in urban and rural contexts, each in its specific way. Large-scale urban concentrations are particularly fragile because of their complexity and the accumulation of population and infrastructures in limited areas.

7. Some patterns of consumption, production and development have the potential for increasing the vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly of the poor and socially disadvantaged groups. Sustainable development can contribute to the reduction of this vulnerability, if it is so planned and managed that it ameliorates the social and economic conditions of the affected groups and communities.

8. Vulnerable developing countries should be enabled to revive, apply and share traditional methods to reduce the impact of natural disasters, supplemented and reinforced by access to modern scientific and technical knowledge. Nevertheless, one must study and learn from the existing knowledge and know-how and try to ameliorate, develop and better apply them today.

9. Global social stability has become more fragile and reduction of natural disasters would reduce this fragility.

10. In disaster management the full continuum from relief through rehabilitation, reconstruction and development to prevention must be the underlying concept towards the reduction of human and physical losses as the ultimate objective. Disaster prevention is better than disaster response.

11. Achieving the goals, objectives and targets of the Decade, as adopted by the General Assembly in its relevant resolutions, would result in greatly reducing disaster losses.

12. Maximum participation at the community level mobilizes considerable potential and traditional expertise in the application of preventive measures.

B. Assessment of the status of disaster reduction mid-way into the Decade

Explanatory note

The assessment should provide the readers of the "Declaration" with an overview of the Decade results compared with the original recommendations, in order to lay the basis for a renewed strategic approach (comprising the Decade) which will justify and enforce the specific plan of action contained in Part II.

1. Awareness about the potential of disaster reduction is still limited to specialized circles and has not yet been successfully communicated to all sectors of society, in particular policy makers and the general public.

2. At the same time, however, activities at the local, national and international levels in training, technical applications and research, and in regional cooperation, in the first years of the Decade have had positive benefits in some regions in reducing disaster losses.

3. Equally, frameworks at the national level (national Decade Committees and Focal Points) and at the international level (the Decade secretariat, the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Special High-Level Council) have been established, which have laid the basis for intensified preventive and preparedness efforts in the second half of the Decade.

4. Education and training programmes and facilities for people professionally involved and the public at large have not been sufficiently developed with regard to potential disaster reduction.

5. The potential of the information media, industry, the scientific community and the private sector at large has not been sufficiently mobilized.

6. These new efforts have not systematically been part of multilateral and bilateral policies.

7. It must be noted that not all bodies of the United Nations system have contributed to the implementation of the Decade to the extent possible and as

expressed by the General Assembly in the adoption of its resolution 44/236. It must also be noted that, during recent years, emphasis has again been placed primarily on disaster response both within the United Nations system and beyond. That has slowed down the momentum of the Decade's initial phase, as based on the consensus on the importance of action before disasters strike.

8. Achievements have been made during the first five years of the Decade, although they have been uneven and not in a concerted and systematic way as envisaged by the General Assembly. Only if those achievements are recognized, consolidated and accelerated will the Decade be able to reach its goals and objectives and, as such, to contribute to the development of a global culture of prevention.

9. The existing tools for improvements in disaster response, as part of a comprehensive approach towards disaster management, are not always made use of in a sufficient way.

10. There is a need to strengthen the resilience and self-confidence of local communities to cope with natural disasters through recognition and propagation of their traditional knowledge, practices and values in development activities.

11. Experience has demonstrated that, although not included in the original mandate of the Decade, the focus of disaster reduction should be enlarged to cover natural and other disaster situations, including environmental and technological disasters and their interrelationship, which can have a significant impact on social, economic, cultural, and environmental systems, in particular in developing countries.

C. Strategy for the Year 2000 and beyond

Explanatory note

The broad principles to be affirmed by the Conference in chapter I.A., and the assessment of achievements and gaps during the first half of the Decade call for a redefined strategy based on the reconfirmation of the objectives of the Decade and an improved and accelerated approach. This strategy is the basis for the Plan of Action contained in Part II, and will be developed under the following headings.

The following elements should be included in the Strategy:

1. Development of a global culture of prevention.

2. A policy of self-reliance in each vulnerable country and community with capacity-building, allocation and efficient use of resources.

3. Education and training in disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

4. Improvement of awareness in vulnerable communities, including a more active and constructive role of the media with regard to disaster reduction.

5. Involvement and active participation of the people, which is essential for disaster reduction, prevention and preparedness and is also conducive to improved risk management.

6. Improved risk assessment, broader monitoring and communication of forecasts and warnings.

7. Integrated policies for reduction of, preparedness for and response to natural disasters and other disaster situations, including environmental and technological hazards.

8. Coordination and cooperation among ongoing national and international disaster research activities and at universities and other technical and scientific institutions, having in mind that links between causes and effects, inherent to all types of disaster, should be investigated through interdisciplinary research.

9. Effective national legislation and administrative action, and placing higher priority at the political decision-making level.

10. Placing higher priority on the compilation and exchange of information on natural disaster reduction, especially at the regional and subregional levels through the strengthening of existing mechanisms and improved use of communication techniques.

11. Promotion of regional/subregional cooperation between countries exposed to the same natural hazards through exchange of information, joint disaster reduction activities and other formal or informal means, including the establishment or strengthening of regional and subregional centres.

12. Making available existing technology for broader application.

13. Integration of the private sector through promotion of business opportunities.

14. Promotion of the involvement of non-governmental organizations, including indigenous non-governmental organizations, in natural hazard management, in particular those dealing with environmental and related issues.

15. Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to assist in the reduction of losses from natural and related technological disasters, including coordination and evaluation of activities through the Decade and other mechanisms.

II. PLAN OF ACTION

Explanatory note

The Plan of Action will be presented as a series of concrete recommendations relating to the key points of the strategy. Each action recommended should take into consideration technical and resource-related feasibility and respond to a recognized requirement.

A. Recommendations for action

Explanatory notes

The recommendations in chapter II.A. will be structured in a way to define generally accepted broad-based activities, required and implementable at all levels involved, starting from the community level towards global activities. This is to be endorsed by the World Conference with the aim of providing a basis for evaluating concrete improvements by the end of the Decade.

All recommendations grouped in relation to the levels mentioned below should answer the questions what should be done, why it should be done, how it should be done and when it should be done and by whom.

1. Activities at the community and national levels

During the remaining part of the Decade all countries are called upon:

1. To express in a formal way the political will to reduce their vulnerability, through legislation or policy decisions at the highest level, which would require the progressive implementation of disaster assessment and reduction plans at the national and community levels.

2. To encourage continued mobilization of domestic resources for disaster reduction activities.

3. To develop a risk assessment programme and emergency plans in order to focus efforts on disaster preparedness, response and mitigation, and to design projects for subregional, regional and international cooperation, as appropriate.

4. To develop a documented National Disaster Management Plan with an emphasis on disaster reduction.

5. As appropriate, to establish and/or strengthen National Committees for the Decade.

6. To encourage the taking of measures to upgrade the resistance of important infrastructure and lifelines.

7. To give due consideration to the role of local authorities in the enforcement of safety standards and rules and to strengthen the institutional capacities of natural disaster management at all levels.

8. To consider making use of non-governmental organizations' support for improved disaster reduction at the local level.

9. To incorporate disaster reduction prevention or mitigation in the development planning based on risk assessment.

10. To clearly identify specific aspects of disaster prevention that could use the knowledge or expertise that may be available from other countries or from the United Nations system.

11. To endeavour to document all disasters.

12. To incorporate cost-effective technologies in mitigation programmes, including forecasting and warning systems.

13. To establish and implement educational and information programmes generating public awareness in order to ensure support for and effectiveness of disaster reduction programmes.

14. To integrate the media as a contributing sector in awareness raising, education and opinion building for the recognition of the potential of disaster reduction to save human lives and protect property.

15. To set targets that specify how many distinct (i.e. local) disaster scenarios can reasonably be given systematic attention by the end of the Decade.

16. To aim at genuine community involvement and empowerment at all stages of disaster management programmes, and give due consideration to the active participation of women in order to facilitate capacity-building, which is an essential precondition for reducing vulnerability of communities to natural disasters.

17. To aim at the application of traditional knowledge, practices and values of local communities for disaster reduction, thereby recognizing these traditional coping mechanisms as a valuable contribution to the empowerment of local communities and the enabling of their spontaneous cooperation in all programmes of disaster prevention and mitigation.

2. Activities at the regional and subregional levels

Considering the many common aspects of disaster vulnerability among countries of a same region or subregion, cooperation among them should be strengthened by implementing the following actions:

1. Establishment or strengthening of subregional or regional centres for disaster reduction and prevention, which, in cooperation with international organizations and with a view to enhancing national capabilities, would perform one or more of the following functions:

(a) Collection and dissemination of documentation and information to improve public awareness of natural disasters and the potential to reduce their impact;

(b) Formulation of education and training programmes and technical information exchange aimed at human resource development;

(c) Support to and strengthening of natural disaster reduction mechanisms.

2. Given the importance of vulnerability of developing countries, particularly least developed countries, technical, material and financial resources should be made available in support of concerned subregional or regional centres to strengthen regional and national capacities to reduce natural disasters.

3. Improvement of communication on natural disasters among the countries of the region in the context of preparedness and early warning systems.

4. Establishment and/or strengthening of early warning mechanisms for disaster reduction at the subregional or regional level.

5. Commemoration of the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction at these levels.

6. Establishment of mutual assistance agreements and joint projects for disaster reduction within and between regions.

7. Periodic review of progress made on disaster reduction at political level in regional forums.

8. Regional organizations should play an effective role in the implementation of concerned regional plans and programmes on natural disaster reduction.

9. The international community should give highest priority and special support to activities and programmes relating to natural disaster reduction at the subregional or regional level in order to promote cooperation between countries exposed to the same risks.

10. As decided by the General Assembly, special attention should be given to the least developed countries in support of their activities in the field of natural disaster reduction.

11. Regional arrangements should be carried out in close coordination with and should supplement the national programmes for disaster reduction.

12. The international community should assist the developing countries in establishing measures to integrate disaster prevention and reduction within the existing machinery and strategies at the national, regional and subregional levels for poverty eradication in order to achieve sustainable development.

3. Activities at the international level, in particular through bilateral arrangements and multilateral cooperation

To be considered:

1. In the spirit of international cooperation, the encouragement of all activities to reduce disasters, in particular those laid down by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

2. It is recommended that extrabudgetary resources be provided for implementation of the Decade and, therefore, that voluntary contributions from Governments, international organizations and other sources, including the private sector, be strongly encouraged. To this end, the Secretary-General is urged to ensure an effective and efficient administration of the Trust Fund for the Decade, as established in line with General Assembly resolution 44/236.

3. Integration of natural disaster reduction into development assistance programmes.

4. Development projects should be designed to reduce, and not increase, vulnerability.

5. Exchange of information on disaster reduction policies and technologies.

6. Reaffirmation of the roles of the Special High-level Council and the Scientific and Technical Committee in promoting Decade activities, in particular the awareness of the benefits of disaster reduction.

7. Enhancement of the functions of and cooperation between the United Nations, governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations related to disaster reduction, including more efficient use of existing resources.

8. Wider support for the existing mechanism within the United Nations system to expand its advice and practical assistance, as required, to countries facing natural disasters and other disaster situations, including environmental and technological hazards.

9. The need for adequate coordination of international activities in the field of disaster reduction should be emphasized and mechanisms established for this purpose should be strengthened. Such coordination should relate, in particular, to the formulation of development projects which provide assistance for disaster reduction and their evaluation.

10. Priority should be given to the establishment, or improvement, of warning systems and the effective dissemination of warnings.

11. Effective coordination of international disaster management, in particular by the United Nations system, is paramount for an integrated approach to disaster reduction and should, therefore, be strengthened.

12. The holding of a review conference on natural disaster reduction at the end of the Decade with a view to mapping-out a strategy into the twenty-first century.

B. Proposals to the Conference

Explanatory note

Chapter II.B should accommodate specific proposals from delegations and other participants, of which the World Conference will take note and which it might propose for compilation in a global reference document.

III. FOLLOW-UP ACTION

Explanatory note

Proposals and requests with regard to immediate and longer-term procedural follow-up action, which will ensure that the Document obtains the necessary endorsement for full and effective implementation.

1. Decision to transmit the report of the World Conference, containing the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

2. Request that the General Assembly consider the adoption of a resolution endorsing this outcome and of an appeal to all countries to continue working towards the objective of a safer world for the twenty-first century.

3. Transmit the outcome of the World Conference to the mid-term global review conference on the implementation of the Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, to be held in 1995 as decided by the Assembly in its resolution 48/171.

4. Reaffirm the crucial importance of a substantial reduction in the loss of lives and in the physical damage caused by disasters by the year 2000 and of continuing the disaster reduction process beyond the end of this century, as appropriate.

5. Request the Secretary-General to ensure that the outcome of the Conference be given as wide as possible dissemination, including transmission to relevant international and regional organizations.

6. Request the secretariat of the Decade to communicate the outcome of the Conference to national committees and focal points for the Decade, relevant non-governmental organizations, scientific and technical associations and the private sector.